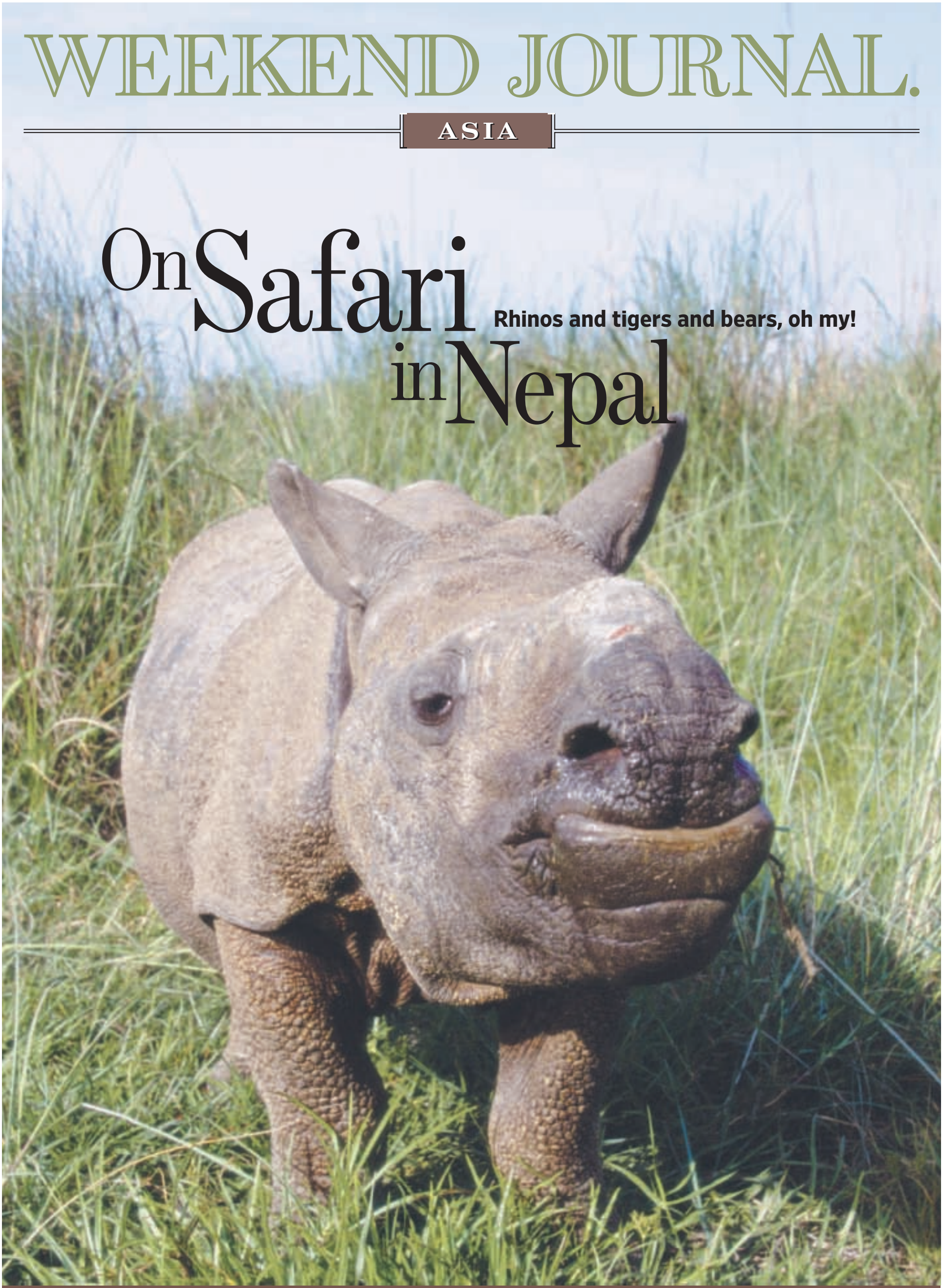
WEEKEND JOURNAL.

ASIA

On Safari in Nepal

Rhinos and tigers and bears, oh my!



One hour out: Brisbane

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WEEKEND JOURNAL
ASIA

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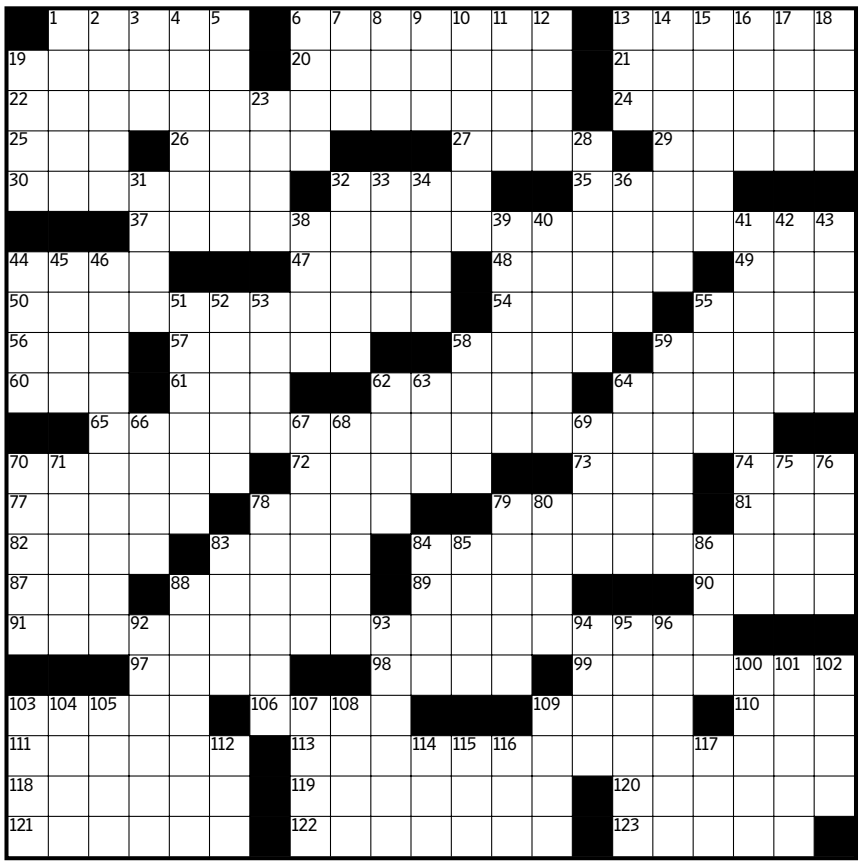
A publication of
THE WALL STREET JOURNAL ASIA.

THE JOURNAL CROSSWORD / Edited by Mike Shenk

I Have a Dream / by Gabriel Stone



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Last Week's solution

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Hip, hip ahoy

Fashionistas go crazy for stripes this spring

By Christina Binkley

Chanel (Chanel), Associated Press (Tautou); Givenchy by Riccardo Tisci; Brett Williams (T-Los Angeles); Agence France-Presse/Getty Images (Gaultier)

The marinière shirt was popularized by Coco Chanel (top far right), and Audrey Tautou (above) wore one in the film 'Coco Before Chanel.' Designers now featuring the stripes in spring fashions include Givenchy by Riccardo Tisci (center top), T-Los Angeles (near right) and Jean Paul Gaultier (far right).

Designer Jacqueline Krafka was surprised recently when a navy-and-white striped dress from her T-Los Angeles spring collection became an overnight best seller. In order to meet the demand for the $120 dress, she moved up her delivery schedule.

It's just one of the signs that we are in for a very striped spring.

"We love stripes!" says Colleen Sherin, women's fashion director for upscale U.S. retailer Saks Fifth Avenue, whose stores will be awash in striped styles in February: tanks, T-shirts, mini-dresses, tunics—"really, just stripes galore," she says.

Fashion lines from Givenchy by Riccardo Tisci to Esprit and Comptoir des Cotonniers are bringing out the nautically inspired stripes for spring women's wear, and menswear designers including Michael Bastian and Burberry Brit also are going with the look. It's based on the boat-necked French marine pullover, which was traditionally worn by low-ranking sailors as they swabbed the decks, and hence is known in France as a marinière, or sailor-style, shirt.

For all the pondering and pontificating that goes into creating fashion, the reasons why a style takes off are often mysterious. Sometimes, trends evolve slowly from the runways where high-fashion designers strive to introduce new concepts. The plaid that's everywhere this winter emerged from the autumn 2007 runways, where Jean Paul Gaultier showed a vividly plaid Scottish collection.

In the case of Ms. Krafka's stripes, though, the source lies more in the streets and movie theaters. A popular film and several recent books about Coco Chanel have everything to do with the marinière revival. When the French-language film "Coco Before Chanel" debuted in April 2009, it helped ignite new interest in the designer's 60-year career and her habit of adapting menswear to her own devices. The marinière is so closely connected with Ms. Chanel that its use in fashion is often attributed to her. The actress Audrey Tautou wore a marinière in her role as Ms. Chanel.

American Vogue showed striped nautical shirts from Marni and Proenza Schouler in May 2009, hitting the streets around the same time as the film. About that time, actress Gwyneth Paltrow put a photo of herself in a Saint James marinière on her Web site, Goop.com, writing, "The classic French T-shirt always looks right in spring year after year." In the following months, the shirts made appearances in magazines from Elle to Japan's Child magazine.

During Paris fashion week this past autumn—right when store buyers were placing spring orders and magazines were figuring out what to show on their spring pages—the streets of Paris were full of young men and women wearing marinières. They were everywhere—so numerous that I began snapping photos with my BlackBerry, in one case capturing the backs of four young people walking abreast, all in nautical-striped shirts tossed over slouchy pants or skirts.

Sailor stripes seem perfectly attuned to the current zeitgeist. For men, they offer a sense of tradition, honest labor and virility. That's the stuff so many longed for when the boom economy went bust. What kind of man is sexy when bankers aren't? A hearty working stiff, a hunky deck swab. For women, the marinière offers clean unisex simplicity. And despite the adage about horizontal stripes being fattening, their clean, crisp lines are actually flattering.

"We've been very much more ornamented in recent years," says Julie Gilhart, fashion director for retailer Barneys New York. After stocking winter clothes covered with sequins and other embellishments, it has ordered a quantity of stripes for spring. "Now our customer wants to go back to something more simple."

Sailor uniforms have come in and out of fashion for more than a century. Often, the looks were based on the officers' double-breasted coats or the dressier uniforms that have a broad collar with a V-shaped front and a flap across the back. The striped sailor's work shirt is decidedly more casual. It's such a steady muse for Mr. Gaultier that he dresses his press assistants in them for his shows each season. Last year, France's Musée National de la Marine thanked Mr. Gaultier for "exceptional" help in producing its book "Les Marins Font La Mode," or "Sailors Make Fashion."

This cyclical interest has long been a boon to Saint James, the French company that has made marinière shirts and sweaters since roughly 1850. It makes a variety of styles for men, women and kids today, but the traditional men's sweaters come in two versions: The trim one known as the "matelot" is priced at $170. The "binic" is more generously cut "for if you enjoy life—if you are a little fat," explains the Manhattan store manager, Brian Lebretton. It's priced at $215.

My only advice, if you catch this bug and go for the authentic Saint James marinière, is to get it in cotton. The wool version is so authentic—i.e., scratchy—that I'm even more in awe of the sailors who wore them.

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Hard to say, easy to drink

Unpronounceable wines from Croatia, Hungary and Slovenia win favor

By Lettie Teague

Vanessa Stump for The Wall Street Journal (3); Joe LeMonnier (map)

Left, Lou Amdur of Lou, a wine bar in Los Angeles, says, 'The Eastern bloc is like Austria 20 years ago'; far left, a bottle of Irsai Olivier, a Hungarian white

'Try the Pannonhalmi Tricollis," the bartender at Ardesia advised me. A wine bar in midtown Manhattan, it had been open for only a few months. Were they already trying to unload their unpronounceable—hence unsalable—wines? Or did I look like an easy mark, the sort who would fall for a wine that had as many consonants as it did vowels? On the other hand, it cost just $7 a glass.

The 2008 Apátsági Pannonhalmi Tricollis turned out to be a terrific find: a dry, minerally white Hungarian blend of three grapes (Welschriesling, Riesling and Gewürztraminer). The estate was founded by the late Tibor Gál, a Hungarian who had spent years in Italy making Ornellaia, the famed Super Tuscan, before returning to his native land. (Mr. Gál's assistant, Zsolt Liptai, is the current winemaker.)

A number of wine directors from New York to Los Angeles have become enamored recently of linguistic tongue twisters like Furmint, Kékfrankos, Juhfark and Posip—grape varieties from Hungary, Slovenia and Croatia, countries once better known for their political ineptitude than their viticultural excellence.

Whether the wines from these countries will become The Next Big Thing or merely The Latest Little Thing remains to be seen. In the meantime, French insurance companies as well as French, Spanish and Portuguese wine estates have all been putting money into Hungarian wineries, and Slovenia has attracted winemaking consultants from nearby Italy and Austria. Croatia, slated to join the EU later this year, has enticed prominent American businessmen like Robert Benmosche, the CEO of American International Group, and restaurateur Joe Bastianich, partner of Mario Batali. (Mr. Bastianich will debut his wines later this spring as part of a joint venture in Istria to produce Malvasia Istriana. Mr. Benmosche's wines may take a bit longer; he's still busy running AIG.)

The hero of this unlikely revolution might be Frank Dietrich, who founded Blue Danube, a Los Angeles-based company specializing in Croatian, Slovenian and Hungarian wines, about seven years ago. Back then, by Mr. Dietrich's own account, his wines were dismissed as "East Bloc schlock" by most of his potential clients. Even Mr. Dietrich's warehouse manager referred to the bottles in his charge as "Croatian crap"—and still kept his job.

But Mr. Dietrich has made plenty of converts in the past several years, as wine professionals have become intrigued by a part of the world where centuries-old wine estates are finally being modernized. (In some cases, that may even mean replacing oak barrels that date back to the Ottoman Empire, which collapsed 85 years ago.)

Some of the wines of these countries used to be among the most prized in the world. The sweet wines of the Tokaj region of Hungary, for example, were once considered equal to the greatest Sauternes. (Beethoven was said to have been a fan.) But wine quality declined precipitously under Communist management that issued production quotas and discouraged individual initiative. It wasn't until the early 1990s, after Communism ended, that private companies (many owned by foreigners) began investing in wineries and vineyards. Modern technology was introduced, vineyards were replanted and slowly the quality has risen to international standards.

"The Eastern bloc is like Austria 20 years ago," said Lou Amdur of Lou, a wine bar in Los Angeles. Mr. Amdur is one of the many, mostly young sommeliers who are seeking "wines of a place"—indigenous varietals instead of the ubiquitous Cabernet or Merlot.

Mr. Amdur's epiphany occurred a few years ago with Kékfrankos, the star red grape of Hungary (called Blaufränkisch in Austria and Germany). "It lights up a different part of your palate," Mr. Amdur explained. "The acidity is reminiscent of Burgundy but it's a little more brambly. It's a food-friendly wine with good acidity and not too much tannin—like many of the wines from this part of the world." Mr. Amdur added, however, that his customers could rarely recognize, let alone pronounce, these wines.

Mike Mraz, wine director of the North Fork Table and Inn, far out on New York's Long Island, solves the problem by offering his hard-to-pronounce wines, most of them from Hungary, by the glass or by pairing them with dishes on tasting menus. "That's the best way to introduce people to unfamiliar grapes," he said. Mr. Mraz is currently featuring the 2007 Irsai Olivier from Monarchia Cellars, a Hungarian white selling for $30 a bottle on his list. He compares the Irsai Olivier grape to Sauvignon Blanc in aroma and body and Muscat for its distinctly spicy note. He noted that it's easier for him to sell a "weird wine" like Irsai Olivier than it is for a retailer, because he is able to take the bottle to the table and explain it to customers who might otherwise be scared off by the name and the label.

Monarchia Cellar's erstwhile importer, Peter Matt, understood that particular challenge. He simply called the wine "Oliver" and gave it a bright green modern label that looked like it could have come from anywhere in the world (its Hungarian origin is noted in small type on the back). The packaging worked according to Mr. Matt, and so did the pricing, about $12 retail. Moderate prices are another one of the attractions of these wines, especially when compared with wines from neighboring countries like Austria and Italy.

Few wine directors confront their customers as fearlessly as Paul Grieco, co-owner of New York's Hearth restaurant and Terroir wine bar and a not-so-secret proselytizer of the obscure. I had my first Juhfark—a Hungarian white—at Hearth a year ago. Pronounced "yoo-fark," it's a dry, full-bodied wine whose name means "sheep's tail," after the shape of the grape.

Mr. Grieco's current passion is Slovenia's Sämling, also known in Germany as Scheurebe. (Eastern European grapes are like characters in Russian novels—they all have more than one name.) He is particularly fond of the Kogl Sämling 88 Mea Culpa, a wine that is currently featured in a full-page ode to Scheurebe on Terroir's wine list. "This wine sings like a young Britney Spears, joined at the hip to a Wayne Gretzky on power-play mode," Mr. Grieco rhapsodizes about the Kogl. (Mr. Grieco's hockey metaphor comes naturally—like the great Mr. Gretzky, he's Canadian and a former hockey player.) "When Romania and Bulgaria join the EU I think they could be the Chile and Argentina of the next decade," he said.

For Mr. Dietrich, commercial success with wine retailers and *restaurant sommeliers isn't his only triumph. His warehouse manager, John Snetsinger, has recently become a fan of Plavac Mali, a Croatian red grape descended from American Zinfandel. (The relationship between the two grapes was conclusively established by geneticist Carole Meredith of the University of California at Davis in 1988.) When Mr. Dietrich gave Mr. Snetsinger a bottle of Nico Bura Dingac, a Plavac Mali, for his Thanksgiving dinner, the warehouse manager came back a few days later and pronounced the Croatian red "the star of the show."

Lettie Teague writes a wine column for Food & Wine magazine.

Five worth trying

Some standout wines from behind the old Iron Curtain

2008
Kogl Sämling Mea Culpa
$20, Slovenia
Made by one of Slovenia's top producers from the Sämling grape (known in Germany as Scheurebe) this white wine is a lot like a very good Chablis—clean and bright with a lively acidity and penetrating minerality.

2008
Apátsági Pannonhalmi Tricollis
$14, Hungary
This dry aromatic white is a blend of three grapes: Welschriesling, Riesling and Gewürztraminer. It is one of five wines produced in Hungary's tiny Pannonhalma region. The estate was founded by Tibor Gál, who had formerly made Ornellaia, a famous Super Tuscan.

2006
Oremus Mandolas Tokaji Dry Furmint
$26, Hungary
When the owners of Vega Sicilia, the superstar Spanish winery, purchased this fabled Hungarian estate in 1993 it seemed like an unlikely investment. But the wines produced there—both sweet and dry—have been consistently outstanding. This white is Chardonnay-like in texture and richness but possessed of the spicy aromas characteristic of the Furmint grape.

2008
Toljanic Zlahtina Krk
$18, Croatia
There aren't many wineries that offer a grape-pronunciation guide on the front label, but when the grape is Croatian-native Zlahtina (Zhlah-tee-naj) from the island of Krk, it's helpful. This bright, clean white is crisp and refreshing—the Croatian answer to Sauvignon Blanc.

2007
Pfneiszl Soproni Kekfrankos
$15, Hungary
The Pfneiszl estate, located in the Sopron region of Hungary, is owned by Birgit and Katrin, the Pfneiszl sisters (which sounds a bit like a musical duo). The label is Iron Curtain-era ugly but the wine inside is a very pleasant, light-bodied, Gamay-like red with a juicy, food-friendly acidity and earthy, spicy aromas.

Keep on truckin'

The man behind the Korean taco craze tries a new market: restaurants

Ethan Pines for The Wall Street Journal (Choi); Eric Shin (tacos)

Roy Choi, left, created buzz selling his Kogi tacos, above, from trucks on the street. Now with a new restaurant, he wants to reinvent the rice bowl.

By Katy McLaughlin

Los Angeles

Chef Roy Choi is standing in front of the restaurant space he bought a day ago. It's a 10-table, bare-bones dive in a small West Los Angeles strip mall, with the previous operators' pen-drawn signs for $4.95 entrees hanging in the windows . Mr. Choi says he plans to open in late February. He and his partners have decided not to redecorate.

"Come back here in May," he says. "There will be pandemonium in this parking lot. Cars backed up 20 deep."

From any other chef, the prediction would seem ludicrous. But Roy Choi has achieved unlikely success before: He turned "Korean tacos," served from a truck, into one of the most talked-about food trends in America last year. Now, the 39-year-old, Tupac Shakur-quoting chef is aiming to prove that his street-food success was no fluke and that his unique culinary persona—part flavor-fusion visionary, part classically trained chef, part street rebel—can change the future of food.

Mr. Choi's company, Kogi, started in late 2008 as a single mobile food truck that parked outside nightclubs on Sunset Boulevard late at night, selling Mexican tacos stuffed with Korean-style meat. Within three months, it began drawing crowds of hundreds and soon added more trucks. The company used Twitter to alert customers to trucks' locations.

Today Kogi, with four trucks and one outlet in an L.A.-area nightclub, has nearly 52,000 Twitter followers. Scion, a division of Toyota, recently paid $90,000 to custom-build Kogi a car outfitted with a grill, sink and refrigerator. Mr. Choi says he will use it to cook "amuse-bouches," or hors d'oeuvres, for people waiting in line for Kogi.

The new, still unnamed restaurant won't use the Kogi name, Mr. Choi says, and he doesn't plan to serve the taco. Instead he will try to update the rice bowl. "I see bacon-fat-studded chestnuts and fresh herbs on braised lamb; steak with a soft-poached egg and hand-crushed sesame seeds; organic rice, braised pork belly, freshwater spinach in a beautiful broth with sesame leaves," he says, rattling off ideas. The food, he says, will be inexpensive enough that people who normally eat McDonald's will be able to afford it.

"At first I was like, 'You're crazy,'" says Mark Manguera, 31, who along with his wife, Caroline Shin-Manguera, is Mr. Choi's business partner. "But Roy has taken us this far. He's a soul-searcher. This restaurant is his blank canvas."

Mr. Choi's signature taco is made with beef short ribs marinated in soy sauce, sugar, mashed pears and kiwi, and then wrapped in corn tortillas and topped with onions, cilantro, cabbage and a secret, 21-ingredient sauce. It costs $2.

Soon after Kogi's launch, Korean tacos began popping up everywhere. In June, the Baja Fresh chain, with about 280 units, put a "Baja Kogi taco" on a test menu after meeting with Mr. Choi and his partners several times to discuss a possible partnership. (The chain did not end up making a partnership deal with Kogi. In July, the chain changed the name of its menu item to "Baja Gogi." Baja Fresh didn't return calls seeking comment.)

Competitors' trucks called Bool, Bull Kogi and Calbi (bought this autumn by Baja Fresh) that serve their own versions of Korean tacos now circulate around L.A., and Korean tacos have shown up in restaurants from San Francisco to Boston. Curious restaurateurs, including New York's Drew Nieporent, who helped create the Nobu empire, flew to L.A. to try the taco.

Mr. Choi waxes rhapsodic about the taco. "When you eat it, it tells the story about a city," he says. For $2, he adds, people who might not be able to afford fine dining get a taste of food made with expertise, creativity and, he says, love.

"There is something very Korean about Roy being Roy," says David Chang of New York's Momofuku restaurants, who is also of Korean heritage and who met Mr. Choi last spring. "It's about working your a— off, and not believing that you're any good."

Born in Seoul, Mr. Choi immigrated to the U.S. before he was 2 years old. His parents ran a variety of businesses throughout his childhood, from a dry cleaner to a Korean restaurant to a jewelry company. They moved 12 times among Southern California neighborhoods that ranged from gritty to posh as their fortunes changed. At public-school gifted programs, Mr. Choi earned A's, though until he was 12, he "felt guilty if it wasn't an A+," he says.

At age 13, he rebelled, running away from home several times. He began getting C's in school, started dabbling in drugs and hung out with a crowd of burgeoning criminals, he says. When he was 15, his parents sent him to Southern California Military School, which has since closed. It was a good experience, he says, because "all of the kids at military school are screw-ups. It connected me to a lot of kindred spirits."

After high school, he spent a year teaching English in South Korea, received a bachelor's degree in philosophy from California State University, Fullerton, and attended Western State University law school for a semester. But he viewed himself as a failure, outside the circle of Korean-Americans attending top schools, and he hated law school. He soon dropped out.

At 24, Mr. Choi says, he hit a dark period of drinking, brawling in nightclubs in L.A.'s Koreatown and living on friend's couches. By day, he ate Cheetos and watched television, particularly Emeril Lagasse's "Essence of Emeril" show. "Emeril saved my life," says Mr. Choi. With a new path in mind, he enrolled in a local culinary school.

"Korean parents hate to even think about a boy becoming a chef or working in a kitchen," says his father, Soo Myung Choi, 59. "We wanted him to become a medical doctor, lawyer or government official." Finally reckoning it would never happen, the elder Mr. Choi asked his son what the Harvard of culinary arts was, and suggested he attend.

In 1996, Mr. Choi transferred to the Culinary Institute of America in New York. He maintained his rebellious stance, often annoying classmates by bossing them around and insisting on updating classic recipes with his own touches, says fellow student Peter Vaseas. Mr. Choi concurs: When he added peeled grapes to coq au vin, his teammates were furious—though the result was delicious, he says.

Mr. Choi's "externship," a work stint at a restaurant, was at the prestigious Le Bernardin in New York, where he cut tuna poorly, burned things and oversalted food so badly that he was ejected six times from the kitchen, he recalls. Mr. Choi says that although he has spent his life rebelling against what he perceives as a Korean-American demand for success, he still agonizes over the failure. Eric Ripert, Le Bernardin's executive chef, says the restaurant has had many interns over the years and that he doesn't remember Mr. Choi.

In 2001, Mr. Choi began working for Hilton Hotels, promoted through the ranks by Sandy Murphy, today general manager of the Beverly Hilton. In 2007, she made Mr. Choi chef de cuisine at the Beverly Hilton, the chain's flagship. Mr. Manguera, then a hotel food-and-beverage director, met Mr. Choi during a stint at the Hilton. Mr. Manguera brainstormed the idea of a "Korean taco" after a night on the town, and asked Mr. Choi to come up with a recipe. In the autumn of 2008, Mr. Choi surprised Ms. Murphy with some news: He and the Mangueras would be launching a taco truck.

Mr. Choi's classical training shows through in his taco-truck business. "Chef Roy is very particular about cleanliness," says Isis Sanchez, a cook on one of the trucks. "And he makes us taste everything, every morning," she adds—standard operating procedure at fine-dining restaurants.

Walking the truck yard where the Kogi trucks park in downtown L.A., Mr. Choi also demonstrates how his forays into street life contribute to his management style. He greets his crew members with a loose handshake, then bumps half his chest against theirs. He describes a row of traditional trucks that serve construction crews as the "O.G.s," or "original gangsters," of the truck world. To some employees, he speaks Spanish—which is better than his Korean.

Mr. Choi says that in its first year of operation, Kogi grossed about $2 million from check averages of roughly $13 a person. Mr. Choi earns a $90,000 salary; a manager on each truck earns about $38,000. Profit margins are around 20%, which has enabled Mr. Choi and the Mangueras to put money aside for a restaurant.

The team decided to test the restaurant waters with the still-unnamed rice-bowl restaurant. (Over the past year they have met with several investors and restaurateurs to discuss opening a chain of Kogi restaurants, Mr. Manguera says, but so far, no deal has seemed right.) Though Mr. Manguera says he initially fantasized about a "glammed-up" Hollywood location, they decided on the West Los Angeles spot because it was cheap and seemed to fit the "crazy lemonade stand" company style, Mr. Choi says.

News of the restaurant is already attracting buzz on food blogs and Web sites, from Eater.com to the Web site of Food & Wine magazine. Not everyone considers success a foregone conclusion for the restaurant, however. "The proof is in the pudding," says Mr. Nieporent, who considers the Kogi truck's success largely a function of L.A.'s good weather, which encourages lingering on the street.

Mr. Choi likes to start small and surprise potential skeptics. When he started Kogi, he didn't tell his parents. It was his 5-year-old daughter, Kaelyn, who first mentioned a "taco truck" to her grandfather.

"He still thinks he hasn't accomplished anything according to what my wife and I expected," the elder Mr. Choi says. "But we are happy with what he is doing. We are a hundred percent behind him now."

Rocks with a view at Point Lookout; Main Beach, which stretches for 32 kilometers, is in the background.

One hour out: Brisbane

Over the water, the serenity of 'Straddie'

By Rosanne Barrett

Standing in Brisbane's bustling central business district, you're just 36 kilometers as the crow flies from a spot where the deep calm of nature prevails: North Stradbroke Island, in Moreton Bay.

Called "Straddie" by locals, the island is one of the most beautiful and rugged places off Australia's east coast, or indeed anywhere in the country—a haunt for surfers, nature lovers and anyone just seeking a place to relax. (Kilometers of white sand beaches line the island's northeastern side.) But while life is not hectic on Straddie, the easy charm conceals hidden depths and a grim history.

If you aren't a crow, the trip to Straddie starts in the eastern outer suburb of Cleveland. From the center of Brisbane, Cleveland is 20 minutes away by car or an hour by train (it's the end of the Cleveland line; the fare is a little over US$6). Take the free bus from the train station to the ferry station; from there you can hire a car if you want to drive around the island.

Another in a series of articles seeking to answer the question, When a traveler has had about enough of the jingle-jangle of the urban jungle, can relief be just an hour away?

In Cleveland you can also grab a water taxi; the trip to Stradbroke Island takes about 25 minutes (round trip, about $16). If you want to take a car to the island, or you're after the cheapest option, the vehicular ferry, which takes about 45 minutes, costs about $124 for a car and all its passengers, or $10.25 for those on foot. (Stradbroke Ferries, ☎ 61-7-3488- 5300; www.stradbroke-ferries.com.au or Sea Stradbroke, ☎ 61-7-3488-9777; www.seastradbroke.com)

Paved roads link all the townships on the island; four-wheel-drive vehicles are also allowed on the beach and some inland tracks, with a special permit that costs about $42.50 and is available from the ferry terminal or on the vehicular ferry. Stradbroke Island is large in size but simple to navigate. There are three main townships: Dunwich, where you will arrive, Amity and Point Lookout. Most people drive themselves but there are also taxis available.

The ferries aren't luxurious but it is a very pleasant journey. Except during holidays they are mostly filled with high-school students (to complete secondary school they must travel to the mainland daily) and islanders on shopping trips (they can be identified on the island-bound trip by their department-store bags). The ferries are a relaxing way to chug through Moreton Bay and downshift to the Straddie pace of life; there's also more time to look for dolphins, turtles or even the rare dugong, a large sea mammal.

By water taxi or ferry, you'll land at the Dunwich pier on a causeway that is one of the few remaining structures of Australia's convict era. Hand-built by prisoners to provide access for cargo shipping, the causeway is a reminder of the brutal European colonization of the country's east coast. Close by the Dunwich ferry stop is the North Stradbroke Historical Museum and Dunwich Cemetery, which offer more reminders of the harsh life endured by the poor during the first century and more of Australia's colonial history.

Straddie's European settlement started when the British offloaded convicts at Dunwich in 1827—the causeway was built that same year—and conditions didn't really get much better until the 1940s. Because of its isolation, Straddie was used to quarantine people afflicted with leprosy, typhus and other infectious diseases. In 1867, the Benevolent Institution was opened on the island to house Queensland state's mentally ill and merely destitute; it closed in the 1960s.

The Dunwich Cemetery was the last resting place for 8,426 of the institution's

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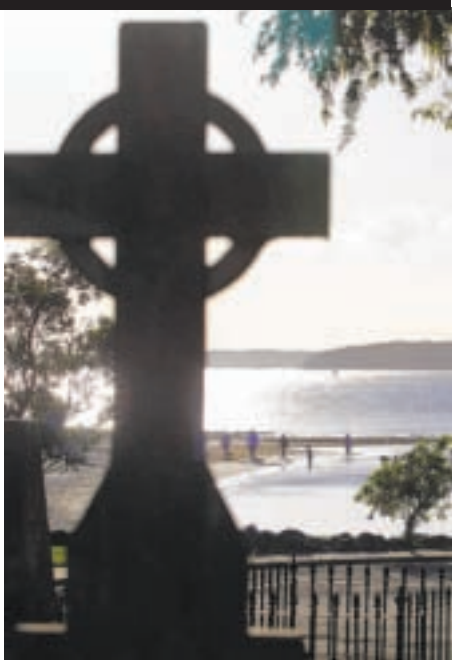


Patrick Hamilton for The Wall Street Journal

"inmates," mostly buried in unmarked graves. Although a symbol of the sad times of the past, the grassy expanse is serene, with a fine view over the bay. At the nearby wood-and-tin museum, (15-17 Welsby St., www.stradbrokemuseum.com.au) the area's history is told through artifacts that include cemetery records, stretchers from the original 19th-century quarantine boats and indigenous objects.

Aboriginal history is very long on Straddie—about 20,000 years, judging by evidence that includes refuse heaps of shells. A strong community remains on the island, which was home to Australia's most famous aboriginal poet and activist, Oodgeroo Noonuccal, who died in 1993. After becoming the first aboriginal woman to publish a book, in 1964, she became an advocate of civil rights for her people. Made a Member of the Order of the British Empire by Queen Elizabeth II in 1970, when she was still known as Kathleen Walker, she controversially resigned to protest the celebration of the bicentennial of British colonization in 1988. She also reverted to her aboriginal name. You can see many of her personal items at the museum, including videos, photographs, letters, artwork and poems.

After getting your historical bearings, jump in the car or catch a taxi and head east through the bush to Brown Lake. The name may be unappealing, but it's a natural wonder. Also known by its aboriginal name, Bummeira, Brown Lake is colored and scented by the accumulated leaves of the surrounding *melaleuca* and tea trees. Its water is said to have healing properties. Accessible without a four-wheel-drive vehicle, it is an ideal spot for a picnic and a soothing dip.

Four kilometers farther up the road is the spectacular and aptly named Blue Lake, set among sand dunes. It's for the more adventurous, as driving the whole distance requires a four-wheel drive; those without must walk the last two kilometers. The area around the lake is a national park, protected for its wild coastal beauty.

After working up an appetite, head back to Dunwich and turn onto East Coast Road; it's a drive of about 20 kilometers to the picturesque town of Point Lookout. The route will take you past the sand-mining area that has been a source of jobs but also controversy about its environmental impact since 1950. The high-silica sand is used in glass. If you're exceptionally lucky you may catch a glimpse of one of the koalas that live in a colony around Amity Point.

Point Lookout is the most visitor-friendly part of Stradbroke Island, with a string of shops at the top of a series of cliffs that offer excellent vantage points out to the Pacific Ocean. There are excellent sweet and savory pies and pastries at the bakery Loaves at the Point (1/15 Mooloomba Rd.), sandwiches and hamburgers at Look Café Bar (corner of Mintee Street and Mooloomba Road; ☎ 61-7-3415-3390) and hearty steaks at the Point Lookout Beach Hotel, "the Straddie Pub" (East Coast Road; ☎ 61-7-3409-8188).

Or prepare your own picnic with the local seafood catch of the day. Fishermen throughout the town advertise their catches on rudimentary blackboards and cardboard signs: "small snapper crabs 3 for $10," say, or "banana prawns $20 a kg." Don't offend them by asking for fishing bait, as they'll likely point to another of their hand-painted signs: "We don't sell bait here" or "For worms, see the house with the blue door."

Straddie afternoons are best spent taking in the atmosphere, searching the horizon for marine life or swimming in the sea. From June to October there are many sites from which you can have a coffee or an ice cream and watch the magnificent humpback whales on their annual migration from the Antarctic to their tropical breeding grounds.

At Main Beach the whales are often visible through the breakers, but there are also viewing platforms above the adjacent Frenchman's and Deadman's beaches. During the season hundreds swim past; and nothing can compare with the sight of them breaching and slapping their tails on the water. Even if there are no whales, Straddie can virtually guarantee dolphins, turtles, manta ray and, often, sharks. The water is so clear, even out to sea, that you can see the sea bottom from the tops of the cliffs. Walk down the narrow path to Main Beach and take a swim or learn how to surf at the lifeguard-patrolled beach.

With its ruggedness and rich history, Straddie is a world away from the city in lifestyle and pace, a contrast best evoked by local Oodgeroo Noonuccal's in her poem "Municipal Gum":

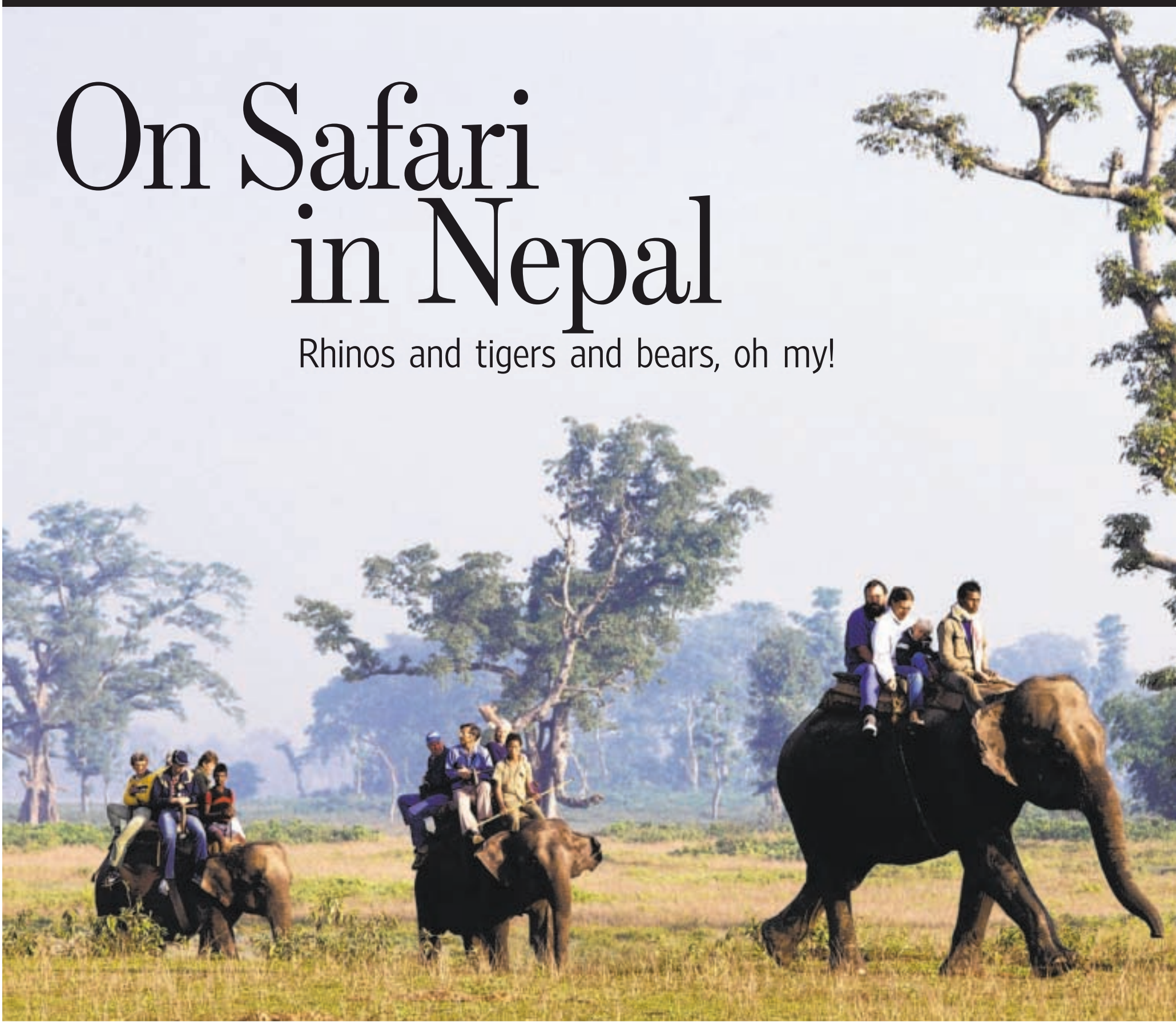
Gumtree in the city street,
Hard bitumen around your feet,
Rather you should be
In the cool world of leafy forest halls
And wild bird calls

Rosanne Barrett is an Australian writer based in Hong Kong.

Clockwise from far left: Choices for the crossing to North Stradbroke Island include water taxis and vehicular ferries; resting the dogs at Point Lookout; sunset as seen from Dunwich Cemetery; and a couple of ways to enjoy Flinders Beach, which stretches for 4.6 kilometers between Amity Point and Point Lookout.

On Safari in Nepal

Rhinos and tigers and bears, oh my!



Chitwan National Park, Nepal

"If an animal charges at you, climb the nearest tree," a guide instructed us at the start of our half-day walking safari. "If there's no tree, don't run everywhere. Stay with us; we will try to protect you."

I don't know about the five Europeans in my group, but this American was less than reassured. Our two guides were carrying nothing but long bamboo sticks to save us from the likes of rhinoceroses, tigers and a species called sloth bears, which are known for their unpredictable temperament. In South Africa two years ago, by contrast, the guides on my walking safari—in which one sees animals on foot instead of from the relative safety of a sport-utility vehicle or the back of an elephant—were armed with powerful rifles.

But life is different when you're on safari in Asia. For one thing, consider the price. In South Africa, my all-inclusive package ran more than $500 a night. In Nepal, my big, comfortable hotel room was $20; more food than I could eat for dinner cost $7; and that walking safari, including a canoe trip at the outset to see crocodiles and birds, was $17.

While Nepal is known for its Himalayan mountain trekking and India for its historic sites and teeming cities, both countries offer professional, well-organized safaris in several national parks. You won't think you're in Africa, where vast herds of all sorts of animals surround you. In both Nepal and India, the main objects of viewing are solitary creatures: the one-horned Indian rhinoceros, which is frequently seen, and the tiger, which is much more elusive. But in the world of safaris, seeing this rhinoceros is a real accomplishment. There are only an estimated 2,500 left on Earth, almost all of them in Chitwan and across the border in India's Kaziranga National Park.

In Nepal, there's also the special thrill of seeing some of the highest mountain peaks in the world and being in the tropics on the same day. On the drive to Chitwan National Park, I got a stunning view in the morning of the Annapurna range, with several peaks above 7,200 meters; stopped off for lunch at the beautifully preserved 18th-century village of Bandipur; and by tea time was swatting mosquitoes in Chitwan. Conveniently, the mountain-trekking and jungle-safari seasons both begin at the same

Above, the best way to see the wildlife of Nepal's Chitwan National Park may be by elephant; right, the less-wild life in one of the villages near the park

Left, a Bengal tiger kept in a cage at Chitwan, as an example to others; below, a walking safari on the move

Corbis (elephants); Stan Sesser/The Wall Street Journal (3); Joe LeMonnier (map)

time, when the monsoon rains let up in September.

For a decade until 2008, as Nepal was torn apart by a Maoist uprising, a Chitwan safari offered more potential adventures than just rhinos and sloth bears for the few tourists who ventured there. None were killed or kidnapped, says Ghana Shyam Gurung, conservation program director of WWF Nepal, but "there was some extortion" and "a few people were taken away for a day or two for 'interviews.'" The insurrection ended with Maoist rebels joining the government and the monarchy abolished.

That's not to say that a trip to this unpredictable country still doesn't offer a surprise or two. I stayed in the tourist town of Sauraha, which is just across the river from the national park. In the park itself are seven resorts, including the famous Tiger Tops Jungle Lodge, which charges $400 a person a night for an all-inclusive package. My original intent was to stay at one of these places, and I made confirmed reservations and discussed the kinds of safari I wanted to take. Only when I got to Kathmandu did I learn that these seven resorts had been closed by government edict since July 16—an action that was entirely legal, because their leases had expired.

Last month, Nepal's cabinet finally agreed to extend the leases three more years, and four of the seven in-park resorts have now reopened. But not Tiger Tops; Chandra Thapa, an official for the company that runs that resort, says the lease payments are still being negotiated. For viewing animals, he said, there's no difference between staying in the park or staying in town and coming to the park just for safaris. The walking-safari guide said the same thing, but noted that the park lodges offer a special experience, of being secluded in the jungle. You can call Tiger Tops at 977-1-436-1500 to check on the status of the reopening.

I found Sauraha—which is little more than a single street with safari elephants almost as numerous as cars—to be a perfectly acceptable substitute. The little hotels on the street all offer a long list of modestly priced activities, including safaris by foot, elephant and canoe; world-class bird watching; rafting trips; and bathing with elephants in the river. I took all three types of safari, and the guides proved to be uniformly friendly and knowledgeable.

Trip planner

Getting there
A visit to Chitwan National Park should start with a few days in Kathmandu; the ancient cities of the Kathmandu Valley are famed for their art-filled Buddhist and Hindu temples. Several Asian airlines fly to the city, including Silk Air from Singapore, Dragonair from Hong Kong, Korean Air from Seoul and Thai Airways from Bangkok.

Although the Buddha Airlines flight from Kathmandu to Chitwan (about $80) is quick, it's worth the trip to Nepal to instead fly to Pokhara for a couple of nights, for in Pokhara you're within easy reach of stupendous sunrise views of the Annapurna range. Get up at 5 a.m. in Pokhara, take a taxi for a half-hour uphill drive to a village called Sarangkot and watch the light slowly bathe a panorama of Himalayan peaks in an orange and yellow glow. A dirt road from there follows the ridgeline through villages, making for a great day hike.

From Pokhara, you can hire a car and driver for the half-day trip to Chitwan, stopping on the way at the historic hill town of Bandipur, a five-star tourist attraction with only a handful of tourists. The Kathmandu-Pokhara flight costs about $80, the car and driver from Pokhara to Chitwan about $100.

Where to stay
In Kathmandu, a superb place to stay is Hotel Courtyard, at the edge of the tourist-friendly Thamel district; the Nepalese-American owner and his American wife are experts at arranging reasonably priced tourist excursions. (☎ 977-1-470-0648; hotelcourtyard.com, about $80 for a double.)

For Chitwan, if hotels within the park remain closed, there are plenty of lower-priced alternatives in the adjacent town of Sauraha. All have arrangements with tour providers for safaris by foot, canoe, four-wheel-drive vehicle and elephant back, each of which will cost around $20. Hotel Riverside has surprisingly nice $20 rooms. (☎ 977-56-580009). More spartan but also more tranquil is Sapana Village Lodge, a couple of kilometers from town, where profits go toward helping the local tribal communities; it excels at arranging safaris and visits to villages (☎ 977-56-580308).

On the main street of Sauraha, KC Restaurant is cleaner and more upscale than most.

An Indian alternative
For much the same safari experience, you can fly to Guwahati, the capital of Assam state, a half day's drive from Kaziranga National Park. (The disadvantage of this plan is that Guwahati is noisy, dusty and chaotic.)

Across from the park, Wild Grass Resort—which for around $75 will send a car to Guwahati to pick you up—has a compound of beautiful old buildings providing decent accommodations and good food ($50; ☎ 91-377-626-2085). The Wild Grass car can take you on tours of local villages, as well, and the resort also arranges elephant-back safaris for about $25.

Kaziranga and the villages in the hills above it are as pristine as India gets. The hills are also the prime growing area for the bhut jolokia, the hottest chili pepper in the world.

Tourists, mostly European, are returning in large numbers for safaris in what is now a comparatively safe Nepal. The wildlife is significantly less numerous. The walking safari, a bit to my relief, went without seeing an animal, and the half-day vehicle safari yielded nothing more than a wild boar and a rooster-like jungle fowl. But from atop an elephant I saw two rhinos, two crocodiles, a peacock and lots of deer. The rhinos seemingly had no fear of elephants; they let us get right next to them. Riding an elephant—the tourists climb a special mounting platform and sit on the elephant's back, protected from falling by wooden rails—was also a lot more fun. The terrain, consisting of forests, lakes and plains of three-meter-high elephant grass, turned out to be uniformly beautiful.

The lumbering one-horned rhino, whose body looks as if it's plated with sheets of armor, was as thrilling to encounter in Chitwan as it was two years ago when I took elephant-back and vehicle safaris in India's Kaziranga National Park. In addition to being the homes of the one-horned rhinos, the two places bear lots of other similarities: They're inexpensive, are terrific for bird watching, and offer easy access to unspoiled rural villages.

The problem with Kaziranga is that it's much more problematic to get to. You have to fly to a major Indian city such as New Delhi and change planes to Guwahati, the dusty, traffic-choked capital of Assam state. It's as charmless a city as I've seen in India. Flying into Nepal's capital, Kathmandu, with its pulsating street life and ancient Hindu and Buddhist temples, is much more satisfying.

Despite a setback during the Maoist rebellion, when Chitwan was without its anti-poaching patrols of rifle-toting Nepalese soldiers, the WWF's Mr. Gurung says conservation efforts are paying off. He notes that the park's rhino population has more than quadrupled since 1970 and now stands at 408, while the tiger population held steady at 122 during the decade of insurrection.

But seeing a tiger is a real rarity. Mr. Gurung himself, in dozens of visits to the park, has spotted the shy and largely nocturnal animal only twice. Occasionally tourists do luck out. One Chitwan hotel manager told me that a group on an elephant-back safari spotted two tigers the week before I arrived.

The tigers are not known to be friendly to human visitors. One man-eater was captured several years ago and, because of his disposition to attack, put in a cage at park headquarters. He can still can be seen there, a somewhat startling violation of the basic principle of safaris.

After the walking safari was over, I asked my guide whether the threat of animal attack was real or theoretical. Very real, he replied, saying he once saved two tourists by beating back a sloth bear with his stick. "A bear or tiger you can fight with a stick, but not a rhino," he added. He knows of at least five guides who have been killed by rhinos over the years, he said, as well as one Nepalese tourist killed last year.

Then why not allow the guides to carry arms? "Our animals are endangered species, not people," my guide, who asked not to be identified, replied cynically. Mr. Bhatta, the park spokesman, has a different explanation. He said that the guides "know the habitat and the animals, and can take care of tourists' security by properly guiding them."

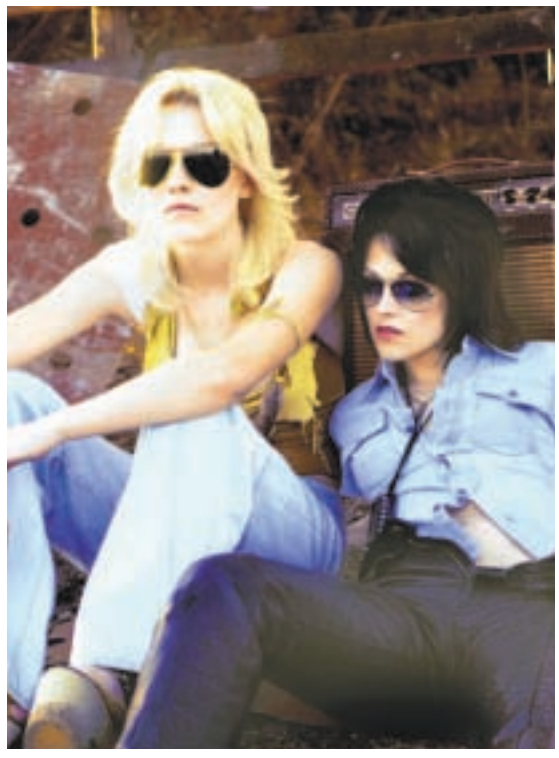
Lonely Planet (canoe); Peter Arnold (rhinos); Getty Images (Swayambhunath)

Top, visitors cross from the town of Sauraha to Chitwan National Park; above, most of the world's 2,500 one-horned Indian rhinos live in Chitwan and across the border in India's Kaziranga National Park; left, no sense in visiting Nepal and missing the sights of the Kathmandu Valley, which include the ever-watchful Swayambhunath religious complex.

Extraordinary stories

The latest from Scorsese, Stone and Scott promise to entertain

By Lauren A.E. Schuker



Paramount Pictures/Everett Collection ('Shutter Island'); Universal Pictures/Everett Collection ('Robin Hood'); CBS Films ('Extraordinary Measure'); Apparition ('The Runaways')

Clockwise from top left: Ben Kingsley, left, and Leonardo DiCaprio in 'Shutter Island'; Dakota Fanning, left, and Kristin Stewart in 'The Runaways'; Brendan Fraser, left, and Harrison Ford in 'Extraordinary Measure'; Russell Crowe in 'Robin Hood.'

'Shutter Island" raised some eyebrows when Paramount Pictures moved the release out of 2009 to February of this year. Wouldn't Martin Scorsese's first narrative feature since "The Departed," and starring Leonardo DiCaprio, want to be out in time for Academy Award nominations?

The studio says it simply was trying to defer spending the marketing money until fiscal 2010, and there's no evidence that this film was troubled in any way: The subject seems perfect for Mr. Scorsese. A U.S. marshal is assigned to investigate the disappearance of a murderess from a mental institution for the criminally insane on an island in Boston Harbor. Mr. DiCaprio, and a partner played by Mark Ruffalo, soon begin to question their assignment—and each other—after the island is plagued by a series of traumatic events, including a massive hurricane during which inmates escape their cells.

Mr. Scorsese agreed to direct "Shutter Island," based on a novel by Dennis Lehane ("Mystic River," "Gone, Baby, Gone") about a week after receiving the script, says producer Brad Fischer of Phoenix Pictures. "After we sent him the script, his agent called and said it reminded [Scorsese] of this old German film, 'The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari,' which was one of the first movies ever made about psychological terror." And the terrain wasn't entirely foreign to Mr. Scorsese: His "Cape Fear," starring Robert De Niro as a rapist who gets out of prison to stalk the family of his former lawyer, is nothing if not psychologically terrifying.

To help set the tone, Mr. Scorsese held nighttime screenings for the cast and crew, from Orson Welles's 1962 "The Trial" to Jacques Tourneur's 1947 noir tale of double-crossing, "Out of the Past" and Frederick Wiseman's once-banned 1967 documentary "Titicut Follies" which follows inmates who were stripped, chained and force-fed at a Massachusetts mental asylum.

This is the fourth collaboration between Mr. Scorsese and Mr. DiCaprio, following "Gangs of New York," "The Aviator," and "The Departed." While the director is probably the most-lauded of his generation, his films had never attained blockbuster status at the box office until "The Departed," which grossed nearly $300 million at the world-wide box office.

The Runaways

In some quarters, Kristen Stewart is already Hollywood's biggest rock star. So who better to play a real one, Joan Jett? Sporting a shag haircut, Ms. Stewart of "Twilight" fame plays a young rocker in this coming-of-age biopic about the 1970s band formed by teenage girls living near Hollywood, including the 16-year-old Ms. Jett (née Joan Marie Larkin). The film is loosely based on lead singer Cherie Currie's memoir, "Neon Angel." The girls in "The Runaways" were all younger than 17 when they broke into a rough, male-dominated rock scene, just ahead of the Go-Go's and the Bangles. While the band never hit the big time, Ms. Jett did, and the Runaways managed to play alongside the Ramones, Tom Petty and Cheap Trick.

Music films generally have a mixed box-office track record, but this one could be a magnet for "Twilight" fans with Ms. Stewart in a lead role. Child-turned-adolescent star Dakota Fanning, who plays Ms. Currie, even has a small part in the most recent "Twilight" sequel. "The Runaways" isn't perfectly suited for 8-year-old "twitards," however: Some themes are dark, including the girls' drug and alcohol use. Ms. Stewart sings in the film; the real-life Ms. Jett served as an executive producer.

Wall Street 2

Gordon Gekko might have been a greed-ridden rogue in Oliver Stone's original 1980s "Wall Street," but he was a glamorous one. Mr. Stone's coming "Wall Street 2: Money Never Sleeps," presents a more chastened Gekko, struggling to adjust after years in prison. Michael Douglas is still a ruthless corporate raider at heart, but the financial world has drastically shifted, markets have gone global, and the entire system is on the brink of a major collapse. Will Gekko find redemption?

Perhaps in a bid to add a fresh perspective to the movie as the immediate financial crisis fades, Mr. Stone focuses more on Mr. Gekko's personal life than did the earlier film. While Fox has kept details of the film under wraps, some of the movie is known to explore Mr. Gekko's attempts to rebuild a relationship with his distant daughter, Winnie (Carey Mulligan of "An Education"), who blames him for her brother's suicide. He bonds with her Wall Street trader fiance, Jacob, played by Shia LaBeouf, helping him investigate financial foul play.

Robin Hood

In his fifth collaboration with Ridley Scott since 2000, Russell Crowe plays the legendary wealth redistributor in this $130 million remake of the timeless tale. Universal Pictures changed the title from "Nottingham" when the film began to focus less on the evil Sheriff of Nottingham and more on Robin Hood. To play the part, Mr. Crowe trained with a bow and arrow for several months to be able to shoot as accurately as possible.

Set in 13th-century England, the film follows the original story, in which Robin—abandoned as a child—and his fellow bandits in Sherwood Forest resist the evil sheriff, played by Matthew Macfadyen. Robin's early childhood issues have long prevented him from falling in love—until he meets Maid Marion, played by Cate Blanchett (Sienna Miller was originally cast, but the studio says it opted for Ms. Blanchett after the role evolved into an older character).

Although the film's steep budget figure has some executives worried, Mr. Scott's previous collaborations with Mr. Crowe have a good track record at the box office. "Gladiator" made more than $450 million world-wide in 2000; "American Gangster" grossed more than $260 million. "Gladiator" and Mr. Crowe also won Academy Awards.

Extraordinary Measure

In this real-life drama, a father, played by Brendan Fraser, and his wife (Keri Russell), are heartbroken when their two youngest children are diagnosed with the same fatal disease, which renders them unable to walk or feed themselves. The couple finds an under-appreciated but brilliant scientist, played by Harrison Ford, to help them find a cure. To create the life-saving drug for the kids, they must raise millions to fund scientific research for a disease few are interested in. Along the way, they battle the medical and pharmaceutical industries. Mr. Ford was an early champion of the project.

Inspired by a 2003 Wall Street Journal story by Geeta Anand, "Extraordinary Measures" focuses on the controversial nature of "orphan drugs"—pharmaceuticals that target rare diseases and therefore seldom get the funding that those for more common disorders do. Double Feature Films, which produced the movie with CBS Films, also produced "Erin Brockovich." That real-life drama won actress Julia Roberts an Academy Award.

Reprises and returns

Lilith and Sade come back; Coke reaches for K'Naan and a hit

By John Jurgensen

Clockwise from top left: K'Naan; Sarah McLachlan; Gorillaz; Sade

James Minchin (K'Naan); Sophie Muller (Sade); Getty Images (McLachlan); Jamie Hewlett (Gorillaz)

K'Naan would like to teach the world to sing. "Wavin' Flag" the singer's upbeat anthem about freedom, has a good chance of becoming one of the most ubiquitous new songs of the year. Coca-Cola has chosen the song as the theme for its sponsorship of the World Cup soccer championship, to be held in South Africa in June. Coke will be using the song in radio and television ads, and in an online campaign based on user-generated videos.

The 2010 World Cup will see the biggest global marketing campaign in Coca-Cola's history, according to the company. Over the next six months, the song will roll out in Coke ads across 150 countries, including the U.S. In other countries, localized versions will be released.

In 1991, K'Naan (born Keinan Abdi Warsame), at the age of 14 fled civil war in Somalia. He first recorded "Wavin' Flag" three years ago as a personal anthem, inspired by his escape. For the World Cup remix, the artist left his original sing-along chorus intact: "They'll call me freedom just like a wavin' flag." But he added thundering African drums and jubilant lines such as "Give me freedom, give me fire, give me reason, take me higher" to make the song a celebration of unity and sport.

"Wavin' Flag" is not the official song of the World Cup itself; FIFA, the event's governing body, will announce its theme music this spring in partnership with another sponsor, Sony. For any of the artists selected for World Cup advertising, the exposure isn't a guarantee of a career payoff, but some previously selected acts have seen a boost. During the 2002 World Cup, when Nike used a remixed version of Elvis Presley's 1968 song "A Little Less Conversation" in a popular ad, the song became a hit.

As the beneficiary of a roughly $300 million marketing spree, K'Naan will be riding a promotional blitz that no record label could afford. It comes at perhaps the perfect time for the singer, whose first U.S. album, "Troubadour," landed on many critics' "best of 2009" lists, yet sold modestly.

Based in Toronto, K'Naan won a 2006 Juno award (Canada's version of a Grammy) for his first album, "The Dusty Foot Philosopher." K'Naan spent almost a year recording "Troubadour" for the A&M/Octone record label. On it he raps with a reggae lilt, mixing hip-hop swagger with references to his youth in Mogadishu.

The singer recently visited Somalia for the first time since fleeing with his family 18 years ago. Speaking by phone from there, he said the World Cup campaign has "injected speed" into an already hectic touring schedule that covered 530 international concerts over two years. He says, "People are shy about putting me in the conversation about the rest of their pop heroes, but it's interesting because their heroes will point to me and say, 'He's one of us.'"

RETURN OF LILITH
June

Lilith Fair, the traveling music festival that featured only female acts, from Sarah McLachlan to Queen Latifah, was one of the most successful concert franchises of the late 1990s, grossing about $53 million in total ticket sales. After its last outing in 1999, the festival often lived on as a punch line, as the fair's somewhat earnest atmosphere felt out of step with the brass and bubblegum of early '00s pop.

Lilith is now getting rebooted by its founders, who include Ms. McLachlan. Organizers are trying to court a new generation of women with a lineup that is heavy on young acts, including singer-songwriter Ingrid Michaelson, country act Sugarland and R&B experimentalist Monae. Original Lilith participants such as Emmylou Harris, Erykah Badu and Sheryl Crow will be performing again. The 2010 tour is expected to launch in June and visit some 20 cities, including Atlanta, Vancouver and London.

GORILLAZ
Spring

The music collective whose members are represented by a motley gang of cartoon avatars (none of which actually resemble a gorilla) is back. Since emerging about a decade ago, Gorillaz has seemed to embody the radical changes roiling the music world, as digital music virtually upended an entire industry. Their last album, 2005's multiplatinum "Demon Days," a ghostly collage of rock, hip-hop and dub reggae, coincided with the explosion of YouTube. The band's popularity culminated with a series of high-tech concerts where the cartoon members "performed" as projections on a stage.

After working on other projects, the group's chief architects—Damon Albarn, the musician behind the '90s Britpop band Blur, and artist Jamie Hewlett—have recruited a new team for the next album. "Plastic Beach" features the work of contributors such as Lou Reed and Mos Def.

SADE
February

The dusky voice behind "Smooth Operator," "Sweetest Taboo" and numerous other familiar slow jams will purr again when Sade Adu delivers her first new material in a full decade. "Soldier of Love" includes a title track that might surprise some fans of the smooth-jazz auteur, featuring martial drums and menacing guitar licks. Other songs, such as "In Another Time," evoke the smooth sound that made her a staple of the "quiet storm" radio format.

The British singer has long worked with the same producer (Mike Pela) and core musicians in her band, known as Sade. Their last album, "Lovers Rock," sold about four million U.S. copies. Such sales figures are nearly unheard-of in the music market Sade is returning to now. But the singer still enjoys a deep reservoir of goodwill among fans, which she built with intimate love songs and maintained by keeping out of the public eye.

SECOND ALBUMS

While young acts typically spend years shaping songs to get a debut album just right—or to get it released at all—follow-up albums are often executed on a demanding schedule and under pressure from career handlers, fans and critics.

This year's sophomore lineup includes some acts whose debut albums electrified the indie rock world.

Vampire Weekend, a New York band that transposed African pop influences into a lighthearted rock sound, explores the influence of sunny California on the album "Contra" (released Jan. 12).

Yeasayer transcended its New York origins with an album flecked with sounds from the Middle East and Africa, 2007's "All Hour Cymbals." The band's "Odd Blood" (Feb. 9) sounds more like the soundtrack to a trip through an underground nightclub in Europe.

In 2008, singer-songwriter M. Ward and singer-actress Zooey Deschanel released a volume of twangy dinner-party pop under the name She & Him. Their follow up, "Vol. 2" (March 23), is a bolder affair, featuring string arrangements and a Motown echo on Ms. Deschanel's vocals.

Arbitrage

Ice skating

City	Currency	US$
Kuala Lumpur	13 ringgit	$3.88
Jakarta	42,000 rupiah	$4.58
Hong Kong	HK$50	$6.45
Manila	300 pesos	$6.55
Bangkok	250 baht	$7.56
Shanghai	58 yuan	$8.54
Singapore	S$18	$12.59
Frankfurt	€9.50	$13.75
Paris	€10	$14.48
Brussels	€12	$17.37
New York		$19.13
Rome	€16	$23.16
London	£22	$35.56

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Blood money

U.S. publisher bets millions on a literary novelist's vampire trilogy

By Alexandra Alter

THE PASSAGE
by Justin Cronin
June 8
Four years ago, novelist Justin Cronin's 9-year-old daughter told him his books were "probably boring," and dared him to write a story about a girl who saves the world. Mr. Cronin took her up on it. The result: a postapocalyptic vampire trilogy that Stephen King has hailed as a captivating epic.

An English professor at Rice University and a graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop, Mr. Cronin is known for his sober, literary fiction, including "Mary and O'Neil," a short-story collection that won the Pen Hemingway Award.

Mr. Cronin, 47, says that he and his daughter, Iris, started mapping out the plot for fun. "The Passage" takes place in the aftermath of a viral outbreak that turned 40 million people into nocturnal, blood-sucking killers. An orphan girl proves immune to the virus's effects but can communicate with infected people. She becomes the last hope for humanity.

When Mr. Cronin's agent sent out an incomplete manuscript, he wasn't expecting a big response. A bidding war broke out, and Mr. Cronin sold the trilogy to Ballantine Books for more than $3 million. Fox 2000 and Ridley Scott's Scott Free Productions grabbed film rights before the first book was even finished.

"When I first got it, I remember the agent compared it to 'The Road' by Cormac McCarthy and 'The Stand' by Stephen King, and I remember thinking that was highly ridiculous," said Ballantine editor Mark Tavani. But he was convinced after reading the submission that the work was unprecedented: a potential commercial blockbuster by an award-winning literary novelist.

Ballantine plans to print an initial 250,000 copies. By comparison, Mr. Cronin's novel "The Summer Guest" sold 12,000 hardback copies and "Mary and O'Neil" 3,000, according to Nielsen BookScan.

Ballantine plans a publicity blitz that will involve an Internet campaign with games and fake government documents. Getting people to read an 800-page book these days is "nervous-making," said senior vice president and publisher Libby McGuire. The second and third books are scheduled for 2012 and 2014. Mr. Cronin says he anticipates the trilogy will total some 3,000 pages.

Mr. Cronin said his daughter, now 13, gave him the idea "before the outbreak of vampire fascination." Blood thirst aside, Mr. Cronin's creations share few traits with the teenage heartthrobs of Stephenie Meyer's "Twilight"—but he said he still hopes fans of Ms. Meyer's romances will be open to his tale.

Mr. Cronin says "The Passage" isn't so different from his other work. "Plot is a way to set a story in motion in which the characters reveal, to themselves and to you and the reader, what they are," he said. "You can do it with a global viral epidemic, or you can do it with an awkward dinner party."

FREEDOM
by Jonathan Franzen
Sept. 1
Fourteen years ago, Jonathan Franzen declared in Harper's magazine that sweeping, socially engaged novels by serous writers had lost their appeal. Then in 2001 he wrote one, "The Corrections," that sold more than 1.5 million copies and won the National Book Award. And now, nearly a decade later, Mr. Franzen is attempting to prove himself wrong a second time.

"Freedom," due out in September, is a multigenerational epic that follows an idealistic young couple that settles in a rough neighborhood of St. Paul, Minnesota. Mr. Franzen's editors at Farrar, Straus & Giroux can hardly contain their excitement.

One of them, Jonathan Galassi, summed it up this way: "It's a very powerful, amazing book about the disillusion of marriage. It's about the challenges and costs of personal freedom, and the burdens of it and the opportunities of it. It's about ecology, personal politics and general issues; it's about Iraq."

SOLAR
by Ian McEwan
March 30
A comedy about climate change, "Solar" centers on a Nobel Prize-winning physicist who leads an initiative to pioneer a new source of clean energy. Like many of Mr. McEwan's previous works, "Solar" turns on a single, dramatic event, in this case, an accidental death—but it marks a departure from the sober tone of his recent novels "Atonement" and "On Chesil Beach."

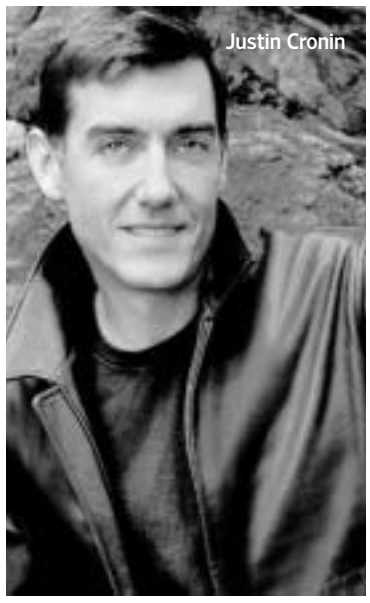
A fastidious researcher, Mr. McEwan often immerses himself in his characters' esoteric fields. To research his 2005 novel "Saturday" he shadowed a brain surgeon. In "Solar," he tosses around such terms as "spectral asymmetry" and "quantum harmonic oscillators."

A VISIT FROM THE GOON SQUAD
by Jennifer Egan
June 15
Jennifer Egan's new book so thoroughly defies categorization that even the author can't decide if she's written a novel or short stories.

"I think of it as entangled stories, in the way that people's lives are entangled," said Ms. Egan, whose four previous books include the best-selling 2006 Gothic thriller "The Keep."

"A Visit from the Goon Squad," being published by Knopf, is built around several characters (including a former punk rocker and a journalist who assaults a celebrity), and crosses genres ranging from "very sad to outright satire," Ms. Egan said.

One of the 13 sections is written as a PowerPoint presentation and another as a magazine profile of a celebrity. Ms. Egan said the book emerged from separate short stories that had overlapping characters and themes, particularly "the role of chance and time in people's lives."



PARROT AND OLIVIER IN AMERICA
by Peter Carey
April 23
Australian novelist Peter Carey's next book, set early in the 19th century, centers on two cranky characters: Olivier, a young French aristocrat born just after the French Revolution, and his salty servant Parrot.

When Olivier, based on the French political thinker Alexis de Tocqueville, travels to New York to write a treatise on American prisons, Parrot is charged with protecting his master, to whom he refers as "Lord Migraine."

Mr. Carey, twice winner of the Booker prize, has published 11 novels, including "Oscar and Lucinda." He has said his new novel, being published by Knopf, was inspired in part by Tocqueville's "Democracy in America." The narrative, which alternates between Parrot and Olivier's perspectives, explores class divisions and differing views of American democracy.

CLEOPATRA
by Stacy Schiff
Nov. 1
Sex, money and power. It's a biographer's dream list of ingredients.

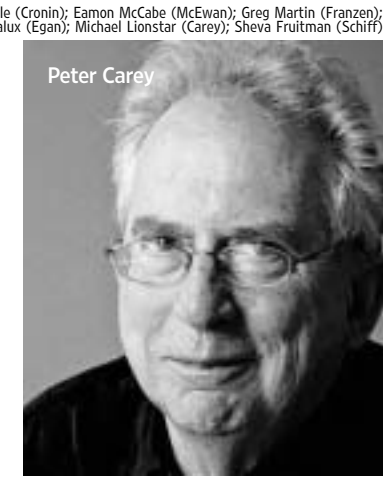
"There's no better story in terms of a narrative that's glittering and has an all-star cast," biographer Stacy Schiff says of antiquity's most famous queen, Cleopatra.

While researching "Cleopatra," being published by Little, Brown, Ms. Schiff found classical historians' accounts contradictory. So she decided to write Cleopatra's biography as a fact-based narrative rather than an academic study.

Ms. Schiff's previous biographical subjects have included Benjamin Franklin, the French aviator Antoine de Saint-Exupéry and Vera Nabokov. "Vera" won the Pulitzer Prize in 2000.

Ms. Schiff also had to wrestle with stereotypes of Cleopatra that have been propagated for centuries. She maintains her subject was a powerful and pragmatic monarch rather than just a seductress.

Gasper Tringale (Cronin); Eamon McCabe (McEwan); Greg Martin (Franzen); Pieter M. Van Hattem/Vistalux (Egan); Michael Lionstar (Carey); Sheva Fruitman (Schiff)



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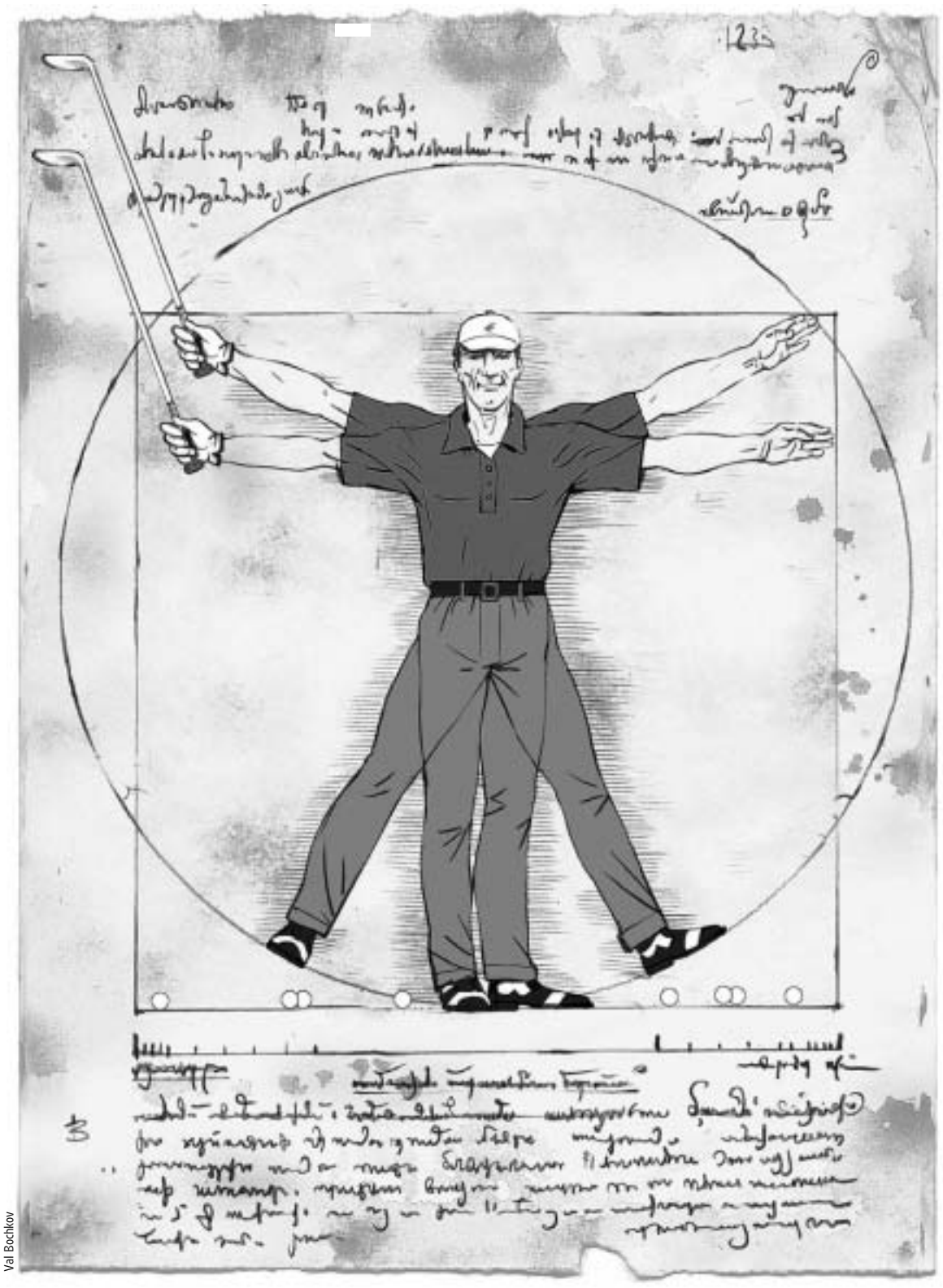


Val Bochkov

Body of evidence

Top pros turn to high-tech researchers to keep in prime golf shape

Golf Journal
JOHN PAUL NEWPORT

Oceanside, California

The Titleist Performance Institute could hardly be in a more anonymous setting: 11 kilometers inland from the Pacific Ocean, surrounded by office parks, recognizable from the main road only by its tall, driving-range-style nets. But on any given day, one is likely to encounter several high-profile Tour pros here. When I visited last month, Brad Faxon was working out in the gym and Ben Crane was toying around on the range. Padraig Harrington was expected a few days later with his full entourage—his caddy, coaches and physical therapist.

Players under contract to Titleist get their equipment fitted here at no cost. The company also does much of its club and ball testing at the facility. But the most intriguing work carried out at TPI involves the golf swing, in particular research into the negative cascading effect that physical limitations and dysfunctions, even seemingly trivial ones like a stiff ankle, can have on a player's ability to hit the ball efficiently. For average golfers with major issues, like immobility in the hips (that would be me), the staff can propose workarounds or pinpoint physical therapy regimens that, with time and discipline, can correct the flaws.

"When an average club member goes to a golf pro, the pro may know a lot about the golf swing, but he usually has no idea what that player is physically capable of doing or not doing. Most of the time, not doing. And without that knowledge, the guy has no chance," Mr. Faxon told me between sets in the gym.

The exercises Mr. Faxon was performing, most of them designed to continue his rehab from his second anterior cruciate ligament knee surgery two years ago, were not the type you usually see at neighborhood sports clubs. One of them, called Turkish Getup, looked like something that 19th-century British army officers with handlebar mustaches and long johns might have done. Hoisting a heavy kettle ball directly overhead, with his arm straight and locked in at the shoulder, he sank to a fully laid-out position on his side on the floor and stood up again, repeatedly, in a prescribed order of movements. I tried this later at home with a much lighter weight and found the maneuver surprisingly difficult and unpleasant. But it is effective (the TPI gurus say) at strengthening and training the body's muscles, especially the core abdominal and leg muscles, to work in unison.

"A lot of the old guard still blame equipment for the increased distance on Tour, but so much more of it is the quality of the athletes," Mr. Faxon said. "You don't have to work out to play on Tour, but if you don't, you get passed, because you're not strong enough. And the stuff we do these days is all full-body, functional movement. Nobody's doing bench presses any more, that's for sure."

TPI's understanding of the swing is based on hundreds of three-dimensional computer recordings it has made over the past decade of top Tour pros hitting balls while hooked up to electrodes, some imbedded in a special vest. "There's no one swing that works best for everyone, but all the top players we've tested hit the ball as efficiently as one another," said Dave Phillips, the golf instructor who co-founded TPI with biomechanics expert Greg Rose in 2004. The pros' efficiency flows from a precisely-timed sequence of energy transfers, from the legs and hips to the torso to the shoulders to the hands and finally through the clubhead to the ball.

When the sequence is out of whack, the computer renderings of the swing reveal where the inefficiencies originated, which helps TPI specialists find a fix. Sometimes the solution is simply a matter of improving technique. Sometimes it involves adjusting a player's clubs. But TPI's special expertise is understanding how and where physical restrictions contribute to weak and inconsistent swings.

The first step for a golfer new to TPI is a physical evaluation, such as the one Lance Gill, TPI's head athletic trainer, gave me last month. It began with questions about the current state of my game and my golf goals, followed by two dozen or so measurements of my strength, flexibility and mobility (the ability of the joints to move properly). I sat on a balance ball and rotated my torso with a pole behind my back. I cocked my wrists at various angles. With my hands overhead, I touched a wall behind my back with my thumbs. I lay on a bench with my knees in the air while Mr. Gill torqued my legs this way and that.

Relative to other guys in their mid-50s, I did well in some areas, such as turning my torso against a stable lower body. But I did miserably on two key measures: the full deep squat, which TPI's research has shown to be the single most predictive test of a player's ability to maintain posture during the swing, and hip mobility. Tour pros can rotate their hips internally 40 degrees or more. I stopped at 20 degrees with one leg and 15 with the other. "That means your ability to rotate on the backswing and follow through is very limited, so you'll probably end up making compensations somewhere else. That means loss of power and eventually injury," Mr. Gill told me.

"Like the lumbar-disc issue I already have?" I asked. "Quite possibly," he said.

Within a few days, Mr. Gill had created an interactive Web page for me that included a series of detailed 30-minute workouts, which I have been doing with some regularity for the past three weeks. The exercises focus exclusively on my weak spots, and aren't much fun. Mostly they require twisting my body into hitherto unknown positions, frequently resulting in muscle cramps. But I am feeling a bit more oily in my hips and my all-important glute muscles (the "king" of the golf swing, TPI says) are getting stronger. Some things, like balance, improve quickly, but hip mobility is stubborn. He told me it will probably take two or three months of consistent work before I see improvement there "start to take hold."

At prices up to $10,000, non-Tour pros can buy a multiday "Tour Experience" at TPI, which includes a physical assessment, exercise and nutritional counseling, swing instruction and new clubs. But the more common approach for recreational golfers is to use the mytpi.com Web site to find a local TPI-certified trainer or instructor. There are 3,200 in 47 countries.

"Ideally you want a team approach—a physical guy to evaluate your body and a coach to work on your swing in coordination with the trainer," said Mr. Phillips. Even golfers who have no intention of going to the gym can benefit because the instructor can build a swing around his known limitations, he said. More typical clients, however, are avid 10-handicap types who want to get down to scratch and say they will do whatever it takes.

"When a guy tells me he's willing to work out for 90 minutes four times a week, I interpret that, from experience, as 15 minutes, three times a week," Mr. Gill said. "But I can give him a focused 15-minute workout that will make a big difference in his game."

Reincarnated in a Comic Book

By Arnie Cooper

For the next several weeks the Los Angeles County Museum of Art's permanent collection, featuring sculptures dating back to the Bronze Age, will be supplemented by a decidedly modern art form: the comic book.

"Heroes and Villains: The Battle for Good in India's Comics" is, according to curator Julie Romain, the first show of its kind in the United States. Ms. Romain, an art historian and UCLA graduate student specializing in Medieval Hindu sculpture, says the goal of the exhibit is to demonstrate how India's artistic legacy of heroic narratives and archetypes has been embraced by comic-book creators.

> Watch out, Wonder Woman: Hindu gods get superhero treatment.

Consider the first image you encounter in the introductory "teaser" section of the 54-piece exhibition: a Virgin Comics cover depicting Rama, the avatar (or incarnation) of the god Vishnu, shooting what appears to be an electrically charged bow and arrow set against a scintillating orange background. And if you take a closer look—at the fine print above the title—you'll recognize the name Deepak Chopra, who apparently isn't just focused on love, god and wrinkle-free skin. Ms. Romain says Dr. Chopra is one of the "visionaries" (his son Gotham was one of the founders), along with the Indian film producer Shekhar Kapur, responsible for "conceptualizing the idea of retelling Indian myths." Now called Liquid Comics, the company was originally named for its affiliation with Richard Branson's Virgin Group.

But enough about new-age gurus and billionaire industrialists. Best to focus on the art—which isn't difficult when you consider the next piece. It's another Virgin Comics cover, this time spotlighting the story of the female divinity Devi, the Sanskrit word for goddess. Clad in skintight black leather from neck to boots, the contemporary version of the mother goddess has been transformed into a modern-day superhero. Only unlike Wonder Woman, Devi can also be seen (albeit in more modest attire) immortalized in a ninth-century sandstone sculpture in the adjoining Gallery of South Asian Sculpture.

"This would probably be on the outside wall of a temple in a niche. It's an icon that's worshipped, but it also depicts this climactic scene in the Devi Mahatnya, the origin story of the goddess, where she conquers the evil demon Mahisha, who takes the form of a buffalo. In a way, this is like the first comic-book story," Ms. Romain says, laughing.

The show also includes a series of storytelling paintings, called Paithan, named for the region in central India where they originate. The 19th-century paintings in this small collection were used by traveling storytellers.

While the exhibition focuses on the two main Hindu deities, Rama and Devi, one of the messages you'll come away with is that the comics reflect, as Ms. Romain suggests, "an extension of [Hindu] practice, culture and tradition."

Not that all of them ignore their American counterparts. For example, once in the show's main exhibition space, visitors will instantly recognize the familiar red-and-blue human arachnid portrayed in a 2004 cover from Marvel Comics' "Spider-Man: India" series.

In fact, Ms. Romain says: "You see more and more a similarity to American comic books and also a retelling of iconic American superheroes. Basically the entire story of Spider-Man and Peter Parker has been lifted and inserted into an Indian context." So instead of Peter Parker it's Pavitr Prabhakar. Aunt May becomes Auntie Maya and Mary Jane Watson is Meera Jain.

Liquid Comics

One could say the history of Indian comics has come full circle since its relatively recent beginning in the 1960s. For apart from a lone strip, "Daabu," created by Pran Kumar Sharma in the early part of that decade, Indian comics unfolded largely with reprints of "The Phantom" and "Superman." These were sold to Indian newspapers by Anant Pai, a newspaper executive credited for launching the Indian comic-book industry.

In the summer of 1967, Mr. Pai was watching a television quiz show and became disturbed because none of the contestants knew the name of Rama's mother, yet they could answer correctly a question about the Greek god Zeus. Add to that the burgeoning popularity of American comics in the subcontinent and Mr. Pai (or "Uncle Pai" as he is best known) decided it was time for India to stake its own claim to the genre.

Later that year he launched his Amar Chitra Katha (Immortal Picture Stories) line with an adventure series about Krishna. Today the company sells about three million comic-book reprints a year in more than 20 languages. Its offshoot, ACK Media, supplies a range of new media from audio books and films to mobile-phone applications. This is a far cry from the early print-only days, when the art resembled the typical Indian calendar prints from the 19th century.

A reprint of a 1975 ACK cover depicts Valmiki's Ramayana. Valmiki, an ancient poet, is believed to have written the original Ramayana in the fifth century B.C., the standard text known throughout India. For the uninitiated, the story outlines Rama's adventures, notably his quest to rescue his wife, Sita, who's been kidnapped by an evil demon, Ravana, with multiple heads.

No doubt Mr. Pai saw his endeavor not just as a money-maker, but also as a way to educate the young. The inside cover used the slogan "The route to your roots."

Ms. Romain notes that these comics were not only used to educate Indian schoolchildren but also collected by Indians abroad who hoped to foster their foreign-born kids' connection to the myths and epics of their heritage.

"That's still happening today. I've talked to a lot of families here who say, 'Oh, I have a bunch of these in my closet that my son used to read.' That's the real draw, and that's why I think they continue to be really popular. These are being reprinted all the time."

Mr. Cooper is a writer based in Santa Barbara, Calif.

Bookshelf / *By Alexander Waugh*

Timely Questions

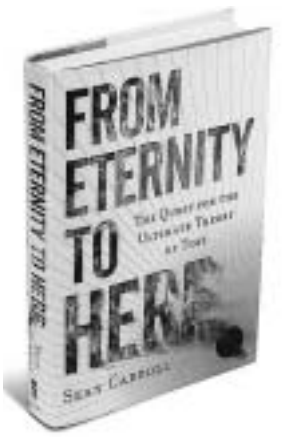
The arrow of time points in one direction only, from past to present to future. Now there's a fact that is so patently obvious as to be unworthy of remark. But ask a theoretical physicist just how obvious that fact really is and you will soon discover that it is not obvious at all. Indeed the "arrow of time" presents one of the greatest mysteries known to modern science. Why so? Well, for a start, no one can agree on what precisely is meant by "past," "present" and "future." As for an agreed definition of "time" itself, we are as far as we have ever been from achieving that.

From Eternity to Here
By Sean Carroll
(Dutton, 438 pages, $26.95)

Chambers English Dictionary defines time as "a concept arising from change experienced and observed, expressed by past, present and future"—a definition that strongly promotes the idea that time is nothing but a product of the human mind. Kant might well have agreed; so too might that ancient sage Augustine of Hippo: "What is time?" he said. "If no one asks I know what it is, but if I am asked I cannot explain." For a physicist's definition, try the Oxford Dictionary of Physics, which describes time as a "dimension that enables two otherwise identical events that occur at the same point in space to be distinguished."

Sean Carroll is a formidable theoretical physicist from the California Institute of Technology, and "From Eternity to Here" is his first work of popular science. He outlines, in the simplest possible terms, all that is known about the arrow of time. That is to say, all that we think we know about the arrow of time, for Mr. Carroll's greatest virtue, aside from the clarity of his prose—an absolute "must" when dealing with matters as complex and counter-intuitive as quantum gravity, black holes, tachyons and dark energy—is his honesty in delineating precisely what is known, what is unknown, what is subjective, what is hypothetical and what is purely theoretical.

Mr. Carroll is not afraid to leave his readers with a general impression that practically nothing is known or properly understood about time, space, our universe or its place relative to anything outside of it. This is one of his book's greatest strengths, for only by admitting to our own lack of understanding can we find the pluck to ask the simplest questions. "Why does the arrow of time flow from the past toward the future—why not the other way round?" The question seems trivial, even a trifle babyish, but Mr. Carroll keeps on asking it and, in his brave attempt to provide a full and coherent answer, takes his readers on a fascinating and refreshing trek through every known back alley and cul de sac of quantum mechanics, relativity, cosmology and theoretical physics.



He explains how, at a subatomic or quantum level, it is far from obvious why the arrow of time should point the way it does, for the laws of physics stipulate that particle interactions are reversible. In the quantum world, time might as well run backward as forward. Imagine a film clip of two billiard balls moving at a steady pace, colliding and bouncing off each other. How can you be sure that the film was not shown to you in reverse—that what you actually saw was time running backward? So Mr. Carroll persists: "Why then, in the observable universe, does time appear to run in one direction only? Why, for instance, when an egg is broken and scrambled into an omelette, if the quantum processes that allowed this to happen are reversible, why does the omelette never reassemble itself into an egg?"

From this simple beginning, and an explanation as clear as you can ever expect to read of the Second Law of Thermodynamics and of universal entropy, Mr. Carroll arrives at his own theoretical postulation of a time before the Big Bang and of the microscopic birth of "baby universes" that, he argues, could form a "multiverse" and provide "a natural mechanism for creating more and more entropy in the universe." In other universes, time might run in the opposite direction to that in which we observe it running in our own. In short, time might elsewhere be measurable by a decrease rather than by an increase of entropy. For, as Mr. Carroll cogently argues, it is entropy (the dissipation of useful energy) that uniquely determines the direction of time's arrow.

The author is well aware that in positing untestable theories such as his "multiverse" he is being unscientific. There are plenty of have-a-go amateurs out there, and he, for obvious reasons, does not wish to be regarded among them. His own Web site seeks to fend off crackpots with the warning: "I am not able to help with questions about physics, your theory of the universe and so on." But to anyone who has grasped the bare rudiments of spacetime, quantum mechanics, inflationary cosmology, etc., the urge to theorize is simply irresistible. He should admit it. To claim, as he does, that his "multiverse" is not a "theory" but a "prediction" is a bit of sophistry that will not exonerate him from such a charge. If, like me, you have also been reading this kind of popular-science book for a long time, you may be disappointed that "From Eternity to Here" does not hugely expand the horizon of your previous knowledge.

You may find that a proper understanding of cosmic and quantum science requires a certain suspension of commonsense perception, leading all too easily to forgetfulness. Just like St. Augustine, we seem to understand time when we are reading about it, but as soon as we put the book down we are unable to explain it. The best way to grasp the rich mysteries of our universe is by constantly rereading the best and clearest explanations. Mr. Carroll's "From Eternity to Here" is certainly one of them.

Mr. Waugh is the author of "Time: Its Origin, Its Enigma, Its History" (Carroll & Graf, 2000).

time off

by William Westbrook

Hong Kong

CONCERT

Tango Passion: Led by Germán Augusto Gutierrez (in truth, born in Colombia), the City Chamber Orchestra of Hong Kong tracks the Argentine tango through a century of evolution. The orchestra will be joined by Daniel Binelli at the accordion-like bandonéon—essential to the Argentine sound—Polly Ferman at the piano and dancers Pilar Alvarez and Claudio Hoffmann.

City Hall Concert Hall, 5 Edinburgh Place, Central; Jan. 19, 8 p.m.
Admission: HK$120 to HK$300.
☎ 852-2111-5999
Web: www.urbtix.hk

EXHIBITION

Biodiversity in China: Widely noted for being home to well over a billion members of our own human species, China somehow also has the space (and the range of climates and conditions) to accommodate 325 species of amphibian, 412 species of reptile, 1,387 species of bird, 607 species of mammal and about 4,000 species of freshwater and marine fish. (And don't get us started on plants—30,000 species.)

Hong Kong Science Museum, 2 Science Museum Rd., Tsim Sha Tsui East, Kowloon; to Aug. 31, 1 p.m. to 9 p.m., from 10 am. Saturdays and Sundays, closed Thursdays.
Admission: HK$35.
☎ 852-2732-3232
Web: hk.science.museum

Singapore

CONCERT

James Ingram: Nobody is smoother than this crooner, who actually started in the 1970s as an instrumentalist before catching the ear of master producer Quincy Jones. Mr. Ingram scored a string of hits in the '80s, including duets with everyone from Patti Austin ("Baby, Come to Me") to Michael McDonald ("Yah Mo B There"). Along the way Mr. Ingram has picked up 15 Grammy nominations and three awards.

Esplanade Concert Hall, 1 Esplanade Drive; Jan. 23, 7:30 p.m.
Admission: S$48 to S$148.
☎ 65-6348-5555
Web: www.sistic.com

Sydney

OPERA

Tosca: Opera Australia's first new production in 30 years of Puccini's tale of political persecution, rape, murder and suicide offers American soprano Takesha Meshé Kizart (a late replacement for Cheryl Barker) or Australian soprano Nicole Youl in the title role, depending on the performance. In Italian with surtitles.

Sydney Opera House, Bennelong Point; 19 performances through March 27, 7:30 p.m. except Jan. 23, Feb. 27 and March 27, 1 p.m.
Admission: A$42 to A$297.
☎ 61-2-9250-7777
Web: www.sydneyoperahouse.com

Tour: Asia

CONCERT

Florence and the Machine: The buzz over singer/songwriter Florence Mary Leontine Welch continued to grow in 2009 with Florence and the Machine's debut album, "Lungs." Ms. Welch, who says she writes best when drunk or hungover, describes it as being about love and pain. ("You hit me once, I hit you back," begins "Kiss With a Fist.") These performances will follow a trip across Australia, mostly for Laneway Festivals (see www.lanewayfestival.com.au).

Singapore: Esplanade Theatre, 1 Esplanade Drive; Feb. 7, 8 p.m.
Admission: S$55 to S$80.
☎ 65-6348-5555
Web: www.sistic.com
Tokyo: Liquid Room, 3-16-6 Higashi, Shibuya; Feb. 10, 7 p.m.
Admission: 5,500 yen.
☎ 81-3-3444-6751
Web: smash-jpn.com

Opera Australia ('Tosca'); Universal Music Australia (Florence)

Clockwise from above, Hong Kong: Claudio Hoffmann and Pilar Alvarez join in teaching Argentine-tango history; Sydney: Takesha Meshé Kizart as Floria Tosca in 'Tosca'; Tour: Florence takes her Machine to Asia and Australia.

CONCERT

Sarah Chang: Actually, two separate tours—in Macau, Ms. Chang will be accompanied by the American pianist Andrew von Oeyen in sonatas by Brahms and Franck. She'll move on to Vietnam and then leave Asia, returning a couple of months later to play concertos (Bruch's first or Brahms's only) with orchestras around the region. There's also a March 31 stop in Bangkok.

Macau: Grand Auditorium, Macao Cultural Centre, Avenue Xian Xing Hai, Nape; Jan. 19, 8 p.m.
Admission: 80 patacas to 220 patacas.
☎ 853-2840-0555
Web: www.ccm.gov.mo
Singapore: Esplanade Concert Hall, 1 Esplanade Drive; March 26, 7:30 p.m.
Admission: S$20 to S$100.
☎ 65-6348-5555
Web: www.sistic.com
Hong Kong: Hong Kong Cultural Centre, 10 Salisbury Rd., Tsim Sha Tsui, Kowloon; April 16 and 17, 8 p.m.
Admission: HK$120 to HK$380.
☎ 852-2111-5999
Web: www.urbtix.hk
Shanghai: Shanghai Concert Hall, 523 Yan'an Rd., Huangpu District; April 23, 7:30 p.m.
Admission: 50 yuan to 380 yuan.
☎ 86-21-6217-2426
Web: www.culture.sh.cn

CONCERT

Orchestre National de France: Led by its honorary music director (for life), Kurt Masur, the orchestra will play four all-Beethoven programs. (Besides the three performances listed, there's one in Tainan, Taiwan, on Jan. 23). Each concert will consist of one overture ("Egmont" or "Fidelio") followed by two symphonies.

Taipei: National Concert Hall, Chungshan South Road; Jan. 24, 8 p.m.
Admission: NT$1,800 to NT$6,000.
☎ 886-2-2341-9898
Web: www.ticket.com.tw
Beijing: National Centre for the Performing Arts, 2 Chang An Jie, Xichen District; Jan. 26 and 27, 8 p.m.
Admission: 280 yuan to 1,580 yuan.
☎ 86-10-6417-7845
Web: www.piao.com.cn